

Briefing: heartunions week of action

8-14 February 2017

From the 8th to 14th of February 2017, the TUC will run a special week of action throughout England and Wales. It will showcase the amazing work unions do, and tell the stories of ordinary members and reps. We want to get members involved, tell positive union stories to the wider public, and recruit new members to the union movement.

Why is a February week of action important?

Now, more than ever, we must come together to protect our rights and promote equality in the workplace.

Trade union membership currently makes up about 25% of the working population in the UK. However, barely 5% of trade union members in the UK are aged 16-24, but more than one third (39%) are aged over 50. Yet young workers are some of the most vulnerable, who are particularly affected by low pay, precarious contracts, overqualification, without opportunities for training and progression. They are often working in sectors with low or no union presence and without collective agreements, such as in retail, hospitality and outsourced social care. They are the workers who could benefit the most from union membership, yet their voice is currently missing from our movement.

It is essential these young workers have a better understanding of, and are able to participate in, trade unions. This means that we need to get better at responding to their needs and organising in ways that benefit them. This will mean organising in different ways, using digital tools and listening to young workers values and aspirations. If we are unable to involve young workers, we won't have a trade union movement in the future.

The challenge is significant, but we hope that heartunions week gives members and activists the opportunity, ideas and confidence to rise to it.

What is the theme of the week of action?

The week will showcase the vital work unions do in the workplace and society, and give us all the opportunity to ask friends and family to join us, by joining a union. The week will be branded *heartunions* – a surprising and modern sentiment for trade unions, and an appropriate one in the run-up to Valentine's Day.

What are we going to do?

It's up to you how you, your branch or workplace and your union engage with the week of action. It's your campaign – and you know best how to run something that will engage your members and get local people in your area involved in and enthused.

On Thursday 9th February at 12.30, we'll be running 'The Big Workplace Meeting'. The TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady and some very special guests will be broadcasting a short Q&A live into

workplace meetings around the country. It's your chance to join thousands of other trade union members in a debate about the challenges for unions in growing a stronger movement for us all.

And don't forget, you've got all week – so if you'd like to do more to raise the profile of unions or ask people to join, it's up to you. All week, we want you to tell stories of the great work done by unions and reps where you live and work. We want to know why you *heartunions*.

Barely 5% of trade union members are aged 16-24, but more than one third are over 50

Resources

We have created a logo for you to use however you see fit – feel free to put it on your material and modify the colours so they work for you. The branding guidelines and online resources will be available at www.heartunions.org.

TUC regional offices will have campaign materials for local and regional events including branded enamel badges and pens, accompanying postcards, pull-up stands, tablecloths and campaign props for photographs.

We're also planning to produce additional materials promoting the union advantage, asking people to join a union and highlighting the events we have planned.

▣ 'TALKING UNION' – A BRIEF GUIDE

We talk to colleagues about a range of issues at work. Joining a union can naturally form part of that conversation. It is sometimes best to avoid a sales or a pushy approach and speak to colleagues more generally. Some conversation starters could be the following:

- *How are you finding your role?*
- *What are you enjoying about work?*
- *Are there any concerns that you might have at work?*

Establishing a rapport with colleagues will avoid coming across as 'prying' into their work. It could be that your colleague has never heard of a union. You might want to introduce what unions do and the benefits of joining a union.

If your colleague does not know much about unions they may have some concerns. If they respond with any objections then avoid getting into an argument, respond constructively and stay positive.

The most important skill is to listen so they can see you understand their concerns. In the end, your colleague might not decide to join a union right away, but you have started a conversation with them and you can follow up with them later.

It's critical that we get planning and organising now. Here are five ideas for how you can get involved in *heartunions* week

1. Tell your story and be a heartunions star

We are looking for case studies who can tell the story of the role grassroots lay reps play in private and public sector workplaces across the country. If you want to highlight the great work done by unions and reps where you work and live, please get in touch with Clare Coatman at ccoatman@tuc.org.uk.

2. Get ready for The Big Workplace Meeting

We'd love you to join Frances O'Grady and her very special guests for 'The Big Workplace Meeting' – coming to a computer, tablet or smartphone near you!

This event will take place at 12.30 so it's time to make sure your branch or workplace meeting is in the diary. You probably want to start the meeting at 12.00 (to allow for any unforeseen circumstances) to give members a chance to get ready to tune into Frances' presentation which will be streamed live on www.heartunions.org. The event will last for 15 minutes during which Frances and others will give an update about current union issues and take questions from union members.

Plan ahead, use your own or borrow a laptop and projector to show the 15 minute live broadcast. Or members can bring in their own tablets or smartphones to the meeting. And don't worry: if your branch isn't meeting you can join us solo from your smartphone, tablet or PC, or catch up on

the broadcast on YouTube later. To register your participation please email Michelle Gregory at mgregory@tuc.org.uk.

All the information you'll need – including downloadable posters and recruitment fliers will be available at www.heartunions.org in January 2017.

▣ IDEAS FOR WORKPLACE ACTIVITIES

- *Organise a coffee and cake morning*
- *A walk in your local community*
- *A workplace recruitment fare*

3. Make your plans for recruitment actions in your workplace

Talk to friends and colleagues in your branch, workplace or trades council about what you want to do for the *heartunions* community day of action – and start making your plans!

If you want to make sure that local people or other workers in your workplace know about the great work done by unions and reps where you work and live, why not put up some posters or organise an event, leafletting session or street stall in your

branch or local area? There will be a poster to download with space for your local details. Or you could run a rally or lunchtime talk – you'll know best what works in your local area or workplace. Maybe your members would like to tell their stories on social media? Look out for lots of ways to be involved in heartunions.

4. Spread the word online

Many people don't know about the great work done by union reps in workplaces and the community, so it's important to tell them your stories.

So think about what you can tell the world on social media about why you are a union member and what your union reps have done for you. It's also worth talking to friends and colleagues about why you think they are better off in a union. Use the hashtag #heartunions so you can connect with everyone else talking about the campaign. Now's the time to start planning what you'll put on social media well in advance and get ready to post them throughout the week of action- find us @iheartunions and #heartunions

5. Stay in touch

Our latest online actions will always be up on www.heartunions.org and you can read the latest from the campaign here too. We're looking forward to hearing about your plans!

If you require further information about heartunions please email i@heartunions.org.

USEFUL RESOURCES

- ✓ Find all the resources and merchandise you will need at www.heartunions.com
- ✓ The TUC's [heartunions e-note](#) can help you feel more confident about 'talking union'
- ✓ "[Living for the Weekend? Reaching Out to Britain's Young Core Workers](#)" has information about the challenges faced by young workers today
- ✓ [Unions for a better life](#) leaflet explains why you're better off being a member of a trade union.
- ✓ Tweet us [@iheartunions](#) throughout the week to tell us why you #heartunions

Dates for your diary

Date	What's planned	Resources
Wednesday 8th February	Start of the <i>heartunions</i> week of action Get sharing on social media, get posters up in your community and workplace, tell your local media	Downloadable local media release, posters
Thursday 9th February	'The Big Workplace Meeting' Make sure you've moved your union branch meeting to this day and borrowed a laptop and projector, ready to tune in at 12.30. Or catch-up on YouTube later.	Downloadable posters and flyers
Friday 10th February	Keep sharing your stories on social media – and make sure that everyone you know knows that you are a union member – and why they should be too	Share pictures, videos and stories on social media
Saturday 11th and Sunday 12th February	Time for a rest – or maybe a chance to schedule regional or local events to tell more people why you <i>heartunions</i>	Downloadable posters and flyers
Monday 13th February	Why not speak' to your friends and colleagues about why you <i>heartunions</i> . See our 'talking union' guide for helpful tips on how to get the conversation started.	Talking Union e-note
Tuesday 14th February	It's Valentine's Day - so all the more reason to tell everyone why you <i>heartunions</i> ! Don't forget to tell us too -	Share pictures, videos and stories on social media